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ABSTRACT

Culture is viewed from a sociological perspective through presentation of a case study of social consciousness in San Francisco. Referring to the work of Milton Gordon, the author discusses two theories of social integration. The first theory of assimilation is defined as a process of social and psychological adherence to a core society. The second theory of pluralism is defined as a compounding of different activities and values to make up a group spirit. The enculturation of people in San Francisco is discussed in terms of four composite psychological characteristics--concern, tolerance, internationalism, and pluralism. These characteristics are related to the social process factors of immigration, minority assimilation, ethnic communality, and economic predominance. Vietnamese immigrants are an example of a group which is assimilated linguistically, racially, and sociopolitically into Asian- and French-speaking groups in San Francisco. Reasons given for this assimilation include the desirability of joining a thriving and self-sustaining cultural group, the wish to share linguistic and cultural preferences, and common values. The differences between identification assimilation and enculturation are described. The need for further research into the coexistence of cultures in pluralistic settings is noted. References are included. (Author/DB)

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Moving Toward Cultural Pluralism

Part I

"The Process of Enculturation"

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Introduction

The subject of culture can be viewed from numerous perspectives and can be analysed within an equally large number of disciplines. In describing cultural characteristics the anthropologist describes behavior, and what is interesting about the anthropologist's description is not that it describes the pattern of behavior which is usual and commonplace; but, that it describes that which is different and unusual, especially when the behavior being described can be said to constitute a survival strategy for the people being observed. In recent analyses these different behaviors have been said to emerge as a direct consequence of a different philosophical view of the world labeled by German philosophy as Weltanschauung. Therefore, for the most part, our literature in the field of culture is descriptive, anthropological, centered around unusual practices and more recently, philosophical. It is also psychological in that the descriptions are usually made in behavioral terms.

In this paper we will look at culture from a sociological perspective; and we will attempt to describe and hypothesize upon what Milton Gordon called "the development of (a) sense of peoplehood" as it appears to be working in one modern, urban, North American society, the city of San Francisco.

Social Patterns of Interaction: Pluralism vs. Assimilation

Assimilation is a process of social and psychological adherence to a "core society" and it is said that this adherence can either be: behavioral - where whole cultural patterns are changed to adapt to the core society's; structural - where there is entry into clubs and institutions of the core society; or marital - where intermarriage makes for the intermixture of two "gene pools" that is also called Amalgamation.[1]

Joshua Fishman has referred to the "core society" in the United States as being "... made up essentially of White Protestant, middle-class clay, to which all other particles are attracted."[2]

Cultural Pluralism, on the other hand, is "... the way of orchestration."[3] Horace Kallen described it in 1944 in ways with which we are very familiar today. He wrote, "As in an orchestra, the different instruments, each with its own characteristic timbre and theme, contribute distinct and recognizable parts to the composition, so in the life and culture of a nation, the different regional, ethnic, occupational, religious and other communities compound their different activities to make up the national spirit."[4]

Pluralism and Assimilation are, therefore, two different theories of social integration often perceived to be in conflict with one another.

What neither Kallen, nor Gordon, nor Fishman has elaborated is the nature and extent of the interdependency that may exist between the processes of assimilation and the processes of pluralism. Are they opposite processes or simply opposite outcomes of similar processes? Can the move toward cultural pluralism come about through a process that resembles assimilation? This paper begins to examine these questions.

Anthropologists tell us that the process toward total Cultural Assimilation is called "acculturation". From that we proceed to label an assimilatory process that does not result in total Assimilation but, instead, results in Cultural Pluralism as "enculturation". We note the difference between the two in the following definitions:

Acculturation: To adapt to the patterns, customs and structures of another culture.

Enculturation: To adopt the structures of the core society, while maintaining one's own cultural pattern and customs.

Enculturation, by this definition, involves some structural

assimilation but little, if any, behavioral assimilation in sociological terms. Relying on these difinitions we should then look at some characteristics of one urban, modern North American society where the process of enculturation may be taking place, and where the people are engaged in the "development of (a) sense of peoplehood."[5]

The Setting

San Francisco is a small city. It has only 45 square miles above water and a population of less than 700,000. This works out to a population density of about 15,000 persons per square mile. These two factors point to two likely phenomena. It is likely that a development in one part of town would also affect another part in some way; and it is likely that there would be an attitude of getting along with the 15,000 people who live within your mile. These two demographic factors contribute greatly to two, out of the four, socio-psychological characteristics of a San Franciscan -- concern and tolerance.[6]

In addition more than 50% of the population living in San Francisco is of foreign origin and newspapers are printed in 14 different languages. This contributes to the third and fourth basic characteristics of San Franciscans -- internationalism and pluralism. One of the tasks of sociological theory is not only to identify the factors or variables present in any given social process or situation, but also to

hypothesize how these variables may be related to each other.[7]

The Factor of Immigration

A young Navaho friend of ours read the first draft of this paper and commented sardonically, "You wouldn't have a subject to speak of if the Native Americans had developed a strong immigration policy." And, of course, he is right. The study of cultural interaction is made possible by the situations which have brought cultures into close contact with one another. This study is made integrational by a principle of territoriality which grants no ethnic community a separate land base. With the possible exception of the Native or North American Indian population, no ethnic or cultural group in the United States claims a legal right to occupy and hold a land base as the exclusive domain of the cultural group. The roots of this policy can be traced back to 1818 when the petitions, of certain Irish organizations in New York and Philadelphia, for a piece of land in the West for the Irish were turned down by Congress. The petitions were denied on the grounds that the formal assignment of a national group to a particular territory was unwise and would lead to similar requests by other national groups which would have the effect of fragmenting the nation.[8]

Yet, while the official policy was to prevent ethnic enclaves from forming; custom, climatic preferences, territorial proximity and a host of other societal factors had the effect of creating majority and minority groupings within certain communities, which, through economic factors, such as land ownership and control of capital, would de facto establish the predominance of one group over another in given areas. These territorial patterns are more readily challenged in port cities such as San Francisco, through the factor of immigration. It, then, can be said that the socio-economic factors which contribute to de facto ethnic communality, are altered in more or less predictable ways by the factor of immigration. Nowhere, in the United States, is this more apparent than in the city of San Francisco.

Other Factors in the Social Process

Gordon's hypothesis of cultural assimilation predicts a certain interaction among variables. Gordon says, "Cultural Assimilation or Acculturation, is likely to be first when a minority group arrives on the scene."[9]

The latest minority group to arrive on the scene in San Francisco is the Vietnamese. Teasing out the variable of social class - i.e., accounting for the fact that a large

number of the new immigrants were of middle and upper middle class - we can look at the pattern of demographic placement, and test Gordon's thesis.

Has cultural assimilation taken place? The answer appears to be yes, but not in the typical sense described by Fishman,[10] i.e., where assimilation to a core society is the pattern. Instead there has been a different or pluralistic assimilation process which we label enculturation.

Enculturation in San Francisco

A large number of the newly-arrived Vietnamese were assimilated along linguistic lines, using their second or "prestige" language as the initial carte blanche of assimilation. The French-speaking community of San Francisco made emergency arrangements for the incoming French-speaking Vietnamese. They provided economic assistance, arranged for placement in schools, assisted in the selection of housing within the Franco-American enclaves, and, as can be easily observed in social gatherings of the French-speaking, merged the Vietnamese into their own social patterns. It can be said that a mutual "adoption" took place, independent of race, but dependent upon the sharing of certain linguistic and cultural preferences. This process is clearly one of assimilation, yet it has a pluralistic quality which often

is lacking in the most common processes we have observed. First, it is almost automatic and certainly immediate. In this respect it is very similar to "identificational assimilation" but, as will be explored later, it does not precisely fit into the definition given by Gordon.[11] Second, it is voluntary and unselfish rather than involuntary and opportunistic as in the case of the assimilation of slaves.

The non-French-speaking Vietnamese did not find upon arrival the linguistic enclave that would provide support, but they did find one socio-political and one racial enclave with which to merge.

The socio-political enclave is formed by those, who in the recent past, sought refuge in the United States for political reasons these are the non-Communist Chinese, the anti-Marcos Filipinos, the Koreans and other similarly persecuted Asians.

The racial enclave is formed by more than 124,500 Asians who live in San Francisco. The Asians form, for the most part, a generous and receptive enclave especially when, added to the factor of communality of race, is the factor of socio-political communality. It is, however, a non-linguistic blend or adoption, and the Asian community has been challenged to deal with, yet, another linguistic problem within the framework of education and employment.[12]

Thus the second part of Gordon's thesis appears to be reliable. This second part is stated as follows: "... cultural assimilation or acculturation, of the minority group takes place even when none of the other types of assimilation occurs simultaneously or later, and this condition of 'acculturation only' may continue indefinitely."[13]

The reliability of the thesis however, is hypothetically linked to the existence of a "sense of peoplehood" - along racial, linguistic, economic and social lines - which is said to be functioning in a pluralistic sense and, therefore capable of minimizing value conflicts with the core society because "other" values thrive within those enclaves and these values are generally shared by the new arrivals.

Key to this development are, in the case of the Vietnamese, the similarities that exist between their extrinsic cultural traits or patterns, and those of the Asian community.[14] Whether or not there are also significant similarities between the intrinsic cultural traits or patterns of the Vietnamese and the Asian Americans is a subject for debate, but we suspect that there are significant similarities among several of the intrinsic cultural traits of the newly arrived Vietnamese and those of the San Francisco Asian Americans.

In the process just related, Gordon's thesis of assimilation into a "core society" becomes transformed to assimilation into a branch of the society. We can further hypothesize that a significant factor in this type of assimilation is the economic, social and cultural integration of the societal branch with the total society. In other words, it appears that it is desirable for a Vietnamese to become part of the Asian-American community and this perceived advantage is related to the economic and social status of this particular societal branch. Had it not been desirable to adhere to the Asian-Americans, the Vietnamese would have adhered to other societal branches with a perceived advantage. In typical American societies this means the White Protestant "core society" Fishman defines. The value conflicts that would have resulted from this adherence to the "core society" would have followed patterns of discrimination and cultural subjugation present in other settings, and studied by Gordon and others.[15]

The factor of integration, of the societal branch, labeled enfranchisement in economic terms, is minimally present in San Francisco; and while it has not reached Gordon's last stage of assimilation "absence of value and power conflict,"[16]

or, even, the next-to-last stage "absence of discrimination," it has progressed to stage four of his Seven-stage development, i.e., "development of (a) sense of peoplehood."

The societal branches (the French-speaking and the Asian-Americans) enjoy a separate, but desirable, power base. This base is often institutionally integrated and it seems now capable of supporting new arrivals with whom values, languages or race are shared, with a minimum of prejudice and discrimination; and a modicum of social efficiency.[17]

It appears therefore, that a separate process of social integration which we label enculturation, is able to function in a society where a culturally pluralistic view is fostered, and where this pluralistic view results in a "sense of peoplehood."

This process differs from the one labeled "identificational assimilation". It comes about as a result of the desirability of joining a thriving and self-sustaining cultural group; as well as the tendency for assimilation to take place more readily among those who share extrinsic and/or intrinsic cultural traits.

Social scientists need, now, to look at the coexistence of cultures in pluralistic settings in San Francisco, and elsewhere, in order to determine whether or not the strength

of the culture-clusters is of significance to the promotion of enculturation as a vastly superior model of acceptance and enfranchisement of cultural and linguistic groups.

In summary, we caution the reader to consider certain weaknesses in the proposed thesis. First, we should recognize that San Francisco offers an excellent environment, for reasons outlined earlier, for cultural pluralism. Second, we should note that Vietnamese immigration has taken place in small numbers, and at a time when economic activity is on the rise. Third, we cannot minimize the need to look at the same process in non-pluralistic settings in order to determine whether or not the factor of pluralism is an essential ingredient.

What happened to the Vietnamese who were relocated in rural areas where societal branches share no intrinsic or extrinisc values with the incomming group, or where assimilation still means adherence to the "core society"? These and other questions need to be answered. Still, there remains the example of San Francisco, where in the process of moving toward cultural pluralism, we have seen some very desirable responses to the sociological problem of cultural integration and the desirability of having this cultural integration take place with a measure of social efficiency.

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10. Fishman, J. "childhood Indoctrination for Minority-Group Membership and the Quest for Minority-Group Biculturism in America" Unpublished paper. A revised version of this paper was published under the title "Childhood Indoctrination for Minority-Group Membership", in "Ethnic Groups in American Life," DAEDALUS: The Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Spring 1961.

11. "Identificational Assimilation" is used to describe the pattern of adherence of White Protestant Immigrant groups to White Protestant "core Societies". Several of the identificational principles are present in the situation being examined.

12. Early observations of Chinese school teachers assigned to Vietnamese children seem to reveal a positive attitude toward the linguistic challenge couched upon a racial and/or political empathy and aside from the linguistic dissimilarity.

13. Gordon, M. Assimilation in American Life. Oxford University Press, New York, 1964 - p.77

14. Extrinsic culture traits are things like dress, manner, emotional behavior and similarities in the pattern of second language acquisition particularly at the phonological level; these are said to be external to the group's ethnic cultural heritage.
Intrinsic cultural traits are things like religious believes and practices, ethical values, musical tastes, folk recreational patterns, historical language, literature and a "sense of common past."

15. Gordon, M. Social Class in American Sociology. Duke University Press, Durham, N.C., 1958

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17.

We don't intend to minimize the serious conditions of poverty and discrimination which are still faced by the Asian Americans in San Francisco and elsewhere. Unemployment in Chinatown is today three times the national average and this is certainly not due to unwillingness to work.